

Julia Klimova

# Pilgrimages of Russian Orthodox Christians to the Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona

## Abstract

*This paper looks at pilgrimage trips undertaken by members of a Russian Orthodox Christian parish in Southern California to a Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona. During the interviews about their journeys, pilgrims emphasize the search for authentic spiritual experience through engaging in constant prayer, immersion into the rhythm of monastery life, conversations with spiritual elders, asceticism, and removal from the everyday. The Greek monastery is contrasted to the local Russian Orthodox church, which, while providing spiritual nourishment, can also become susceptible to profane influences and tiresome human conflicts. People are drawn to the Greek monastery as a site of true authenticity (mainly because it was founded by monks from Mt. Athos, arguably the center of Orthodox Christian spirituality), where they can engage in spiritual work more effectively and where they can refill themselves with spiritual grace. Drawing from the ethnographic research of Eastern Orthodox Christian practices, the paper will engage with theoretical concepts of liminality and communitas, and their applicability to the presented case study.*

## Key words:

*pilgrimage; Eastern Orthodox Christianity; monasticism; parish church; communitas; USA*

## Introduction

In this paper I will look at pilgrimages of parishioners of one Russian Orthodox church in Southern California to the Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona. I will consider these pilgrimage trips in the light of similarities and distinctions between communities of parish churches and monasteries. Both are worshipping communities, part of the same Church body, and can therefore be seen as two complementary structures serving the same purpose. But while the parish-based church focuses on the lay community and emphasizes doctrinal instruction and the celebration of sacraments, the monastery community focuses on asceticism and "more personal and interactive approach through the spiritual father – spiritual disciple relationship" (Demacopoulos, 2008, p. 90). In Orthodox Christianity monasticism has always presented a draw for believers who, through centuries, undertook pilgrimages to monasteries in search of a more pure and authentic form of faith.

Julia Klimova, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Anthropology, University of California at San Diego, USA;  
E-mail: jklimova@ucsd.edu

Parishioners of the Russian Orthodox church in Southern California (which I will refer to as a local church) go on pilgrimages to other Orthodox monasteries in the United States for the variety of reasons. Here I will examine pilgrimages to the St. Anthony Greek Orthodox monastery, if only because the number of them has increased in the last few years, with some parishioners going as often as once every two months. This might be attributable to the instability of parish life. For example, from 2005 to 2010 the parish has had three changes of priests and two splits – of varying degrees of magnitude and reasons. The current parish consists almost exclusively of post-Soviet immigrants of different ages and occupations, and from different regions of the former Soviet Union. With obvious individual variation in religious knowledge and embeddedness in parish life, almost all current parishioners are relatively new to the Orthodox faith, having started practicing it in the last 10-15 years, sometimes even more recently. They seek knowledge and guidance in their spiritual growth, while at the same time sharing responsibility for administering and maintaining their local church as a legal entity. Although attending to administrative, financial and legal matters of the church is seen as necessary for sustaining a parish and as a Christian obligation of church members, the inevitable conflicts and tensions that arise out of involvement in any social organization are often considered to be unbearable and even dangerous to one's spiritual state. Pilgrimages to the monastery are seen by many as a way to spiritually strengthen oneself by being immersed into time-tested monastic traditions and practices.

In the light of the themes of *communitas* and contestation, I will analyze this movement between two structures, that is, parish church and monastery, as a search for an idealized state of *communitas*. While both the parish church and monastery constitute forms of anti-structure (in Turnerian terms), when statuses and roles of the normal social structure – the sphere of the mundane and ordinary – are left behind, the heightened sociality of parish life combined with administrative duties create their own structure, which can muddle the main purpose of going to church. This condition is well exemplified in the following statement of one informant: "I come to the Liturgy, receive communion and feel elevated. Then I am immediately confronted with some problem, or have to choose a side in some conflict, and all of the goodness I just experienced is ruined." This feeling of loss is compounded by the fact that in recent years conflicts arose not only among parishioners, but between parishioners and the priest/s as well, which involved questioning his unwavering authority in different matters of managing parish life. One parishioner sadly stated that involvement in church life was wearing her down, to the extent that she has to force herself to even attend services. She then added that this is the reason she is drawn to the Greek monastery in Arizona, where she'd like to go as often as she can – "as if the road there was covered with honey," for it is a place removed from worldly concerns and thus provides conditions for a genuine worship and a true spiritual work on oneself.

This somewhat complicates Turner's notion of *communitas* as it is applied to pilgrimage studies. In their analysis of pilgrimage the Turners (1978) focus on the second, liminal phase of the ritual as a period of profound transformation leading to a forma-

tion of *communitas* among the participants. The Turners consider liminality, and the sense of *communitas* that accompanies it, to be a primary motivation for undertaking a pilgrimage trip. Liminality allows pilgrims to leave behind the mundane existence of everyday life, and removes individuals from the ordinary and familiar. However, for pilgrims in this study the motivation seems to be to escape from the social and communal, from the already existing *communitas*. In order to minimize profane influences embedded in parish life, people usually go on monastery pilgrimages in small groups. These informal trips are not advertised, and occur over the weekend; people leave on Friday evening after work and coming back on Sunday night. This timing implies that pilgrims will not participate in the Liturgy at the local church and, instead, will seek spiritual elevation at the services in the monastery.

The emphasis on the spiritual side of the journey is reflected in those who one chooses to accompany him on the pilgrimage. Ideally one will go with those who have "the same level of spiritual maturity" as she does, in the words of one informant. This remark points to the desire to create a certain type of *communitas* while on the pilgrimage trip, which instead of erasing differences, uncovers some of them. The reason for the trip is framed in exclusively religious terms, with the emphasis on the spiritual work to be done at the monastery; therefore all unnecessary elements of sociality are minimized. If the pilgrim can restrict her interaction with people of different "spiritual maturity levels" – then she can conduct her own spiritual work more effectively.

## Methodology

This study is based on ethnographic material collected between 2008 and 2010 among parishioners of the Russian Orthodox church in Southern California, of which I am also a member. Besides having been a participant-observer on two pilgrimage trips, I conducted interviews with parishioners, including those who went to the monastery on other occasions. Since the majority of interviews were conducted after the pilgrimage trips had been completed, they have a more reflexive quality to them, with pilgrims trying to incorporate their experiences into the flow of everyday life (cf. Frey, 2004). This category of pilgrims falls into what Coleman termed "parish pilgrims" (2004, p. 61). However, unlike the groups described by Coleman, pilgrims in my study visit the monastery more often than once a year and are not led by a parish priest. Before going into the ethnographic discussion and theoretical analysis of the monastery pilgrimage, I will provide a short overview of St. Anthony monastery in Arizona.

## St. Anthony Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona and the tradition of monasticism

The monastery in Arizona is dedicated to St. Anthony the Great, who is considered to be the founder of desert monasticism in the third century. In the middle of the fourth century desert monasticism began to grow "due to the refusal of many Christians to adapt to the more worldly character of the now established Church, and their desire to lead a strictly Christian life" (Mantzarides, 2011). This influx of 'new' Christians (which started under Emperor Constantine) resulted in the separation between parish churches and monastic communities, with the latter seeking to preserve the true spirit of Christianity (Demacopoulos, 2008). This process is not dissimilar to the celebrated

'return to religion' in Russia in the past twenty years, in which people with little or no knowledge about religion started to convert and attend churches.

In the last ten years Orthodox monasteries in North America (which have been present there since the eighteenth century) have acquired more visibility and influence on the broader life of Orthodox churches. Some scholars attribute this to the emergence of "monastic communities in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese under the leadership of Elder Ephraim" from Mount Athos (Vrame, 2008, p. 305). At present there are seventeen of such communities in the US and Canada, including the one in Arizona where Elder Ephraim resides.

Elder Ephraim brought the monks to Arizona from Mt. Athos in 1995. This mountain on the Greek peninsula is a place not only for Greek, but other Orthodox monasteries (Russian, Serbian, and so on), and is accessible only to men: no women were ever allowed there in order not to disturb the monks' pursuit of the spiritual life. Mt. Athos is also known as the Holy Mountain because it is the only place in Greece that is completely dedicated to prayer and worship of God through the set of ascetic practices.

Goals of the monastic life are theologically not different from goals of any Christian, however "the problem for the Christian in the world is that he is called upon to reach the same goal under adverse conditions" (Mantzarides, 2011). While the asceticism of the monastic life is believed to facilitate the work of fighting sinful passions (such as pride and selfishness), the life in the world presents Christians with ever-increasing sets of temptations. The term "world" is used in an Orthodox Christian context to point to the fallen world with all its human attachments, opinions, and pleasures, all of which, while imbedding people in their everyday activities, ultimately create distance from God (see Kenworthy, 2008). While monks reject any attachments to the world, they help to sustain it through their prayers in the wilderness and provide spiritual foundation to the church structure (Hann & Goltz, 2010, p. 13).

In the following section I will return to the ethnographic account of pilgrimages to the St. Anthony monastery, paying particular attention to pilgrims' participation in and narration of practices of transformation. Those include spiritual readings of monastery's landscape, attendance of services, in-between services obedience chores and spiritual conversations.

## On the monastery grounds

### "HEAVEN ON EARTH"

It is not uncommon for pilgrims to use "extraordinary" language when talking about the monastery, which is "compared to heaven, and the abundance of nature is emphasized" (Poujeau, 2010, p. 182). This is not just a figure of speech: rather, it has a firm grounding in the Orthodox theology, which emphasizes "God's call to synergetic partnership with him, by which both human and the surrounding natural world can be

transfigured" (Hanganu, 2010, p. 43). Theologically, this potentiality is ingrained in the biblical view of humans as having been made in the Image and Likeness of God: "the first humans were perfect, but only in potential sense. They had to be endowed with God's image from the beginning and were supposed to grow to full divine likeness through their own efforts and the assistance of God's grace" (ibid., see also Ware, 1995, p. 51). One of my informants explained it this way: "We already have God's image within us – we just need to uncover it. To achieve likeness we need to transform ourselves." Transformation, according to Orthodox tradition, can take place only by following the right set of spiritual practices: prayer, fasting, confession, communion, attending services, all of which clears the way to God's grace, without which no transformation is possible.

The story of the monastery's foundation is a good illustration of the way Orthodox Christians conceive of realization of their potentiality and transformation. This is how my informants retell it, partly relying on some official sources, but also bringing their own insights: monks from Mt. Athos were looking for a place for a new monastery. When driving through the desert, Elder Ephraim suddenly asked to stop, got out of the car and said that the monastery would be built here. It was the middle of the desert, with literally nothing around. But he insisted, because he has heard the ringing of the bells. Soon after that the land was bought, and after praying in the desert Elder Ephraim showed the place where they can drill for water. This was how the spring was discovered deep underground.

This foundational narrative of the monastery is important for several reasons. First, it connects story of the Arizona monastery with many similar stories of hermits finding sources of water in the wilderness, thus making anchoring of the monastic community in the place possible (Fedotov, 1966). Second, the possibility of transformation and uncovering of one's potential is exemplified in nature – as desert can be transformed with proper cultivation, so can our souls. There are citrus orchards, olive groves, vineyards, gazebos and fountains, making the monastery "an oasis in the desert" and "a paradise on earth."

For pilgrims, this lushness and richness of the monastery is a manifestation of how the Holy Spirit works on earth: water springs and gardens of roses in the desert exemplify the harmony of the paradise – the lost state of humanity. Spirituality becomes materialized, the spiritual wealth of the monastery tradition becomes translated into material abundance (cf. Dubisch, 1995; Ware, 1995). The lushness and richness is thus viewed by pilgrims in spiritual terms, as a call for communion with God through nature and people, and as such facilitate the overall spiritual experience.

### STAYING AT THE MONASTERY

Parish pilgrims usually arrive at the monastery just in time for the Divine Liturgy, which starts at 1 am and lasts for three hours (up to five hours on Sundays and major holidays). The Liturgy as well as all other services is conducted in Greek, which none of my informants know, but some know the service well enough to be able to follow it,

while others try to immerse themselves into the flow of new sounds and movements. Familiarity with the Russian service, in which, as my informant said "everything is your own and familiar, including Russian singing which is in our genes," is replaced with "the new and beautiful Greek chanting." She said that, language differences notwithstanding, both services are beautiful and invoke emotions. During the service men and women stand at the separate sides of the church – men on the right, women on the left, and go to communion and icon veneration in an order – first monks, then men, followed by women. The same order is kept when going to breakfast (and other meals) after the Liturgy to a common dining hall. The meals are consumed in silence while listening to the reading from the Lives of saints – in Greek – and are stopped by the ringing of the bell.

One of the monastic ascetic practices is to seek external silence "in order to attain inner stillness of mind more easily," which is not an inertia "but awakening and activation of the spiritual life" (Mantzarides, 2011). Known in Greek as *hesychia*, this inward silence or stillness "signifies concentration combined with inward tranquility" (Ware, 1995, p. 122). Russian pilgrims are attracted to the quietness of the monastery life, as one of them explained: "I like that they don't talk a lot there. In order to develop spiritually you do not need words, what you need is the spirit itself, you follow it and learn from it. This is how you educate yourself spiritually, and not by words. You just try to touch this spirit of life and to try to imitate this lifestyle." This imitation includes not only participation in all services at the monastery, no matter how long they might be, but also in voluntarily undertaking "obedience chores." For men these might include helping monks in the kitchen and in the gardens, and for women cleaning the church and the territory.

In the monastic tradition, involvement in physical labor is closely connected to the ascetic labor of unceasing prayer. A monk immersed in this prayer "prefers some simple occupation which will not require a great deal of thought but will leave him free to combine work with keeping his mind intent in the heart," thus making him "unfitted for the intellectual dialogue of ecumenical gatherings" (Sophrony, 1974/2001, p. 9). Some parish pilgrims offer their help in the monastery chores to achieve complete immersion in the lifestyle. However, they can be assigned chores not of their liking, which can lead to slight disappointments, as in the case of one pilgrim who was assigned to the kiosk to greet visitors – making sure that they were dressed properly and explaining the rules of behavior while on the monastery grounds. This task did not accommodate his notion of contemplative work and of keeping a quiet mind, but nevertheless was viewed by him as a lesson in obedience and humility. Turner viewed the behavior of "liminal entities" as "normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly" (Turner, 1995, p. 95). In the case of parish pilgrims, their transformation into different people was aided by a full submission to the monastery authority, thus embedding in them Christian values that will be carried out into the everyday, outside of the monastery walls. Another example of the lesson for pilgrims' patience and self-discipline is the talk to the spiritual elder, which will be discussed in the next section.

## CONVERSATION WITH THE SPIRITUAL ELDER

Meeting with an elder, which can take form of conversation, confession, or both, is arguably the most important part of the pilgrimage. The institution of elders is part of the tradition of desert monasticism, and it is considered to be the best expression of monastic life. This institute is not unfamiliar to Russian Orthodox Christians, since elders, or *starsy* in Russian, are an integral part of not only Russian monasticism but Russian culture on the whole (see Khoruzhiy, 2006; Paert, 2010). As in English, in Russian the word *starets* means 'old,' however it points not to an attribute of age but to the mature spiritual state of the heart. While in the past elders were confined to the monastery, where their main task was cultivating the relationship of spiritual obedience with one or two monks, elders of modern times bring tradition into the social space (Khoruzhiy, 2006, p. 20). One of the main gifts of the elder is the gift of spiritual discernment, which marks his spiritual authority and comes as "a result of ascetic progress, trial and prayer" (Demacopoulos, 2008, p. 98).

My informants emphasize the importance of finding a spiritual counselor, whose advice it will be safe for their spiritual life to follow. When asked to elaborate on the notion of safety one of them explained:

*"In choosing the spiritual father it is important to know that he is beyond the worldly influences and that he had lived a monastic life. Then he will give you advice from his own experience and not from the books. To give advice from the books one just has to read a lot of books. In this monastery there is a continuity of a lived monastic tradition, and monks' connection to the world is minimal. Elder Ephraim is a spiritual person, and therefore his disciples are spiritual too, and it is safe to get an advice from them."*

While it is safe and spiritually beneficial to get an advice from a spiritual elder, there are dangers involved in following advice from less spiritually mature people, including parish priests. My informants made a distinction between just confessing one's sins to the priest and seeking his advice in various matters. Confessing sins to the parish priest is a valid practice, for his authority and grace come from the institution, and ultimately the confession is made to God and not to a person. On the other hand, taking advice from the parish priest can be dangerous, as he knows one's position in parish structure and may find it hard to separate his own agendas from one's spiritual needs.

Among other dangers involved in having the wrong spiritual counsel, people mentioned the risk of falling into *prelest*. The concept of *prelest*, referred to by one informant, translates from Russian as a "charm" and in an Orthodox Christian context means "spiritual deception." In the Orthodox patristic tradition two basic forms of *prelest* are identified: the first "occurs when a person strives for a high spiritual state or spiritual visions without having been purified of passions and relying on his own judgment," and the second "offers to its victims not great visions but just exalted "religious feelings"" (Rose, 1999, p. 144, 145). Both happen when the heart desires holy feelings but is unprepared and incapable of receiving them. The heart in patristic tradition is seen as "the spiritual centre of the human personality," it enlightens the

mind (Sophrony, 1974/2001, p. 7). The mind, on the other hand, is imbued with the dogmatic teaching of the church, and it is in the union of the mind and the heart in prayer that "the most authentic knowledge of the One True God" is acquired and "our whole being is given over to God" (6). The ascetic traditions of Orthodox monasticism – such as fasting and prayer, combined with regular confessions and/or conversations with the spiritual elder can shield a person from the state of *prelest* and guide in true spiritual work.

Meeting with the elder is not listed on the official monastery schedule as something the pilgrims should do; it is passed through informal channels among the pilgrims themselves. It is a real test to pilgrims' 'spiritual maturity', for waiting for the chance to see elder can take hours or even days, and is a good exercise in virtues of patience and humility. Pilgrims prepare for this conversation in advance – they write down the sins to be confessed, and questions to be asked. As one woman shared: "If you don't ask him anything, he would not say anything. He will listen to your confession, and quietly pray for you. If you need an answer – make sure you ask a question. Better still – write it down in advance, so you will not forget." One informant compared this experience to a regular confession to the church priest: "You know the list of sins, and you just go over them again (after all, we all repeat the same sins). Here it does not seem to work. I started and stopped in confusion, I could not go on. You have to dig deeper if you want it to mean anything." Digging deeper requires hard work, not unlike cleaning of your house: "for me every trip to the monastery is doing the inner cleaning. To tidy up oneself you have to clean out and sort out everything, put it in places. There is a different quality of this process [in monastery] when you are not distracted, otherwise [in regular church confession] you sort of spruce it up, but did not go deep, into drawers." As with cleaning the house, the cleansing of oneself should occur on a regular basis. Engagement in the right practices, orthopraxis, should be constant if one wants to maintain connection with God, receive divine grace, and ultimately transform oneself.

To see the elder, pilgrims gather in the waiting room and put their names on the list with the elder's secretary; however, this does not guarantee that they will be received in order or received at all. It is left up to the elder to determine whether to receive someone, which depends on many factors (distance traveled by pilgrim, duration of his stay), but mostly remains a mystery. Oftentimes not the secretary but the elder himself would come out and point to a person to be next.

Queuing, as Naletova observes, "is an almost inevitable part of pilgrimage. Lines spontaneously form ... in churches when people wait to kiss the cross or an icon, to receive anointing, or to make a confession. Accustomed to waiting, believers use time for prayer" (2010, p. 250). Lines for Russian pilgrims produce a certain amount of anxiety. Many of them spent a substantial amount of their lives in the various parts of the Soviet Union, during times of permanent food and overall commodities shortages, which required constant standing in line, watching for those who try to cut through.



Using time in line for prayer in the monastery is indeed a test for a pilgrim as she watches newcomers being led into the elder's room while those who have been there for hours keep waiting. While some pray, others use the time in line to share stories – of their pilgrimages to other locations, including in Russia, and of their previous visits to St. Anthony monastery. For pilgrims, the experience of waiting in line turns out to be a particular ascetic practice – of letting go familiar 'worldly' responses of assertiveness and vigilance, of exercising self-discipline and restraint, and of redirecting watchfulness from others onto oneself. As one informant put it, "I first thought that lines for confession hinder my inner work, but then I realized that they help to pinpoint my sharp corners, the ones that bother me no matter where I happen to be." The waiting room is therefore one of the spaces the monastery provides to turn known behaviors into new forms of social connection.

The Turners observed that during pilgrimages new types of sociality emerge, when "social interaction is not governed by the old rules of social structure" and when individuals are brought "into fellowship with like-minded souls" (1978, p. 31). Some pilgrims contrast the sociality experienced at the monastery to the one at the local parish church: "it is such a relief to be talking about spiritual matters, spiritual journeys, and not about diets and shopping, and even worse – fighting about finances and management." Being in a temporal pilgrim status at the monastery, people embrace their structural invisibility and their release from practical decision-making, and view the subordination to the authority as a desirable component of their spiritual work.

Sitting in line and waiting to talk with the elder consumes the majority of pilgrims' free time – my informants said that once they had to spend all three days in the waiting room, only to be received by the elder just before their departure. On one of my trips, when we walked out after two days waiting and after all members of our group have been received by the elder, one pilgrim exclaimed: "How nice to be in the sun, after sitting two days in the dark room," to which another replied: "It is better to sit two days in the dark room than to spend an eternity in darkness." This response captures well both the transitory nature of the Christian existence in the world, and the importance of self-work to be done in this life before entering the next. While in terms of ordinary, normal and everyday waiting in the dark room might be considered a waste of time, in the context of spiritual work aimed to getting closer to God two days in darkness was a necessary sacrifice.

## Communitas and contestation

Scholars studying Orthodox Christian pilgrimages, including pilgrimages to monasteries, have attempted to apply the notion of *communitas* in their analysis. Some observe that pilgrims to Orthodox monasteries are encouraged to emulate monks and form a sense of *communitas* with them, although for a short period of their stay at the monastery (Poujeau, 2010, p. 186). Others question whether this can be called *communitas*, since pilgrims are not part of the monastery hierarchy no matter how often they come and for how long they have been involved in working and praying at the monastery, and hence it is difficult to talk about *communitas* in a sense of erasing differences in social statuses (Kormina, 2010).

*Communitas* in the St. Anthony monastery, in my opinion, might be forming not only with monks and nuns, but with other pilgrims in the monastery, and not necessarily with those with whom one comes. Ties among pilgrims can form during many moments of their stay in the monastery: in guest rooms pilgrims share, while waiting in line to talk with the elder, on walks on monastery grounds and around in the desert, in the bookstore, in visiting churches of the monastery to venerate icons and relics. Although the stay in the monastery is very structured and regulated around the monastery schedule, there is some room left for doing personal activities of one's choosing. Oftentimes these activities involve fulfilling "the obligations and concerns of everyday social life such as those of family, patronage, and obligations to the dead" (Dubisch, 1995, p. 43), and therefore cannot be considered completely anti-structural. Praying for the health of living and for the repose of the dead is a common practice in Orthodox Christianity, and giving notes with names of those to be prayed for is a part of divine liturgies, and other services. Russian pilgrims to St. Anthony usually bring prayer notes and monetary donations from the parishioners of their home church with them, and put them into special boxes along with their own. Sometimes they also would fulfill requests from individual parishioners and bring them back books, icons, or prayer ropes.

There is also a possibility of building social relationships and networks with those one meets during the monastery stay. As many Orthodox pilgrims start to relocate and buy houses in order to be close to the monastery, they form social ties among themselves and with those they encounter in the monastery, and continue to socialize outside of the monastery walls. Usually this relocation implies that people moved away from their local parishes as well, thus reintegrating themselves into the new structure – that of monastery's liturgical life. While commenting on this recent trend, parish pilgrims refer to it as "finding one's original home" and creating "our Optina" around the Greek monastery (the Optina monastery was one of the main sites of the revival of monasticism and *starchestvo* in the nineteenth-century Russia, famously depicted by Dostoevsky in his novel *Brothers Karamazov*). Some pilgrims talk about moving closer to the monastery themselves, thus shifting categories of home and far-away places.

According to Eade and Sallnow, the "capacity to absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses, to be able to offer a variety of clients what each of them desires," and to "respond to a plurality" is what gives a pilgrimage destination its universalistic character (2000, p. 15). As part of the universal Orthodox Church, the Greek monastery accommodates not only pilgrims from other Orthodox traditions, but visitors of other Christian faiths as well. However, non-Orthodox Christians are kept from certain practices reserved only for the Orthodox. For example, they are not allowed to participate in the main sacraments, are assigned to different places during services, and consume meals separately from the monks and Orthodox Christians. In the eyes of my informants, this makes them just visitors and not pilgrims, for pilgrimage assumes that one will be dedicated to spiritual work through sacraments of communion and confession, and immersion in the daily rhythm of monastery life. Thus, while parish pilgrims are stripped from their social identity in the local church, their identity as Orthodox

creates boundaries with other visitors and emphasizes the difference between them. The full liminal experience at the monastery, including the possibility of *communitas*, is reserved only for Orthodox believers. Other visitors to the monastery might experience "different degrees or forms of liminality and *communitas*" (Dubisch, 1995, p. 43), or not experience them at all.

Conflicts between orthodoxies and confessional groups and contestations of religious meanings (Eade & Sallnow, 2000, p. 2) exist not only at the monastery site, but also at the site of the local church. Although some parishioners have expressed the desire to visit the monastery, they postpone it by saying that they should put more effort into clearing this house and not be "running around looking for *starets*." This group echoes part of the patristic tradition, according to which one should look for God in one's own heart, and establish Mt. Athos in one's own soul (Theophane the Recluse, see Bolshakoff, 1980). While pilgrimages to the monastery can be beneficial and have no harm in them, the main goal should be "to work on your own soul, to search for the holiness inside you, and to find holy places around you" (interview). The parish pilgrims counter this perspective, saying that their trips help them in renewing these searches for holiness inside, the intensity of which tends to weaken with time but returns after the monastery visit.

Then there are those parishioners who did visit the monastery, but were overwhelmed by the amount of regulations and rules. As one informant put it: "who cares what kind of skirt I wear, better focus on what is inside than on how tight one's dress is." She called it "hypocritical" to require women to cover themselves and be modest, while the monastery grounds are so full of non-ascetic material richness. Another informant agreed by saying that she would rather go to the Russian monastery in America, which is "closer to us in spirit, not so materialistic and pragmatic." Parish pilgrims, on the other hand, point to the missionary component of the Greek monastery, which is based not on the outreach programs but rather on the principle of "come and see." The monastery's beauty and comfortable accommodations attract people who otherwise might not have visited it. This is particularly important in the American context with its almost complete lack of knowledge of Eastern Orthodox Christianities. "Monks came from complete isolation [on Mt. Athos] to complete openness. This was done for a reason," one informant said. Pilgrimage to the monastery indeed emerges as "an arena for competing religious and secular discourses" (Eade & Sallnow, 2000, p. 2), with accentuating different aspects of faith and practices by parishioners of the local church.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented a discussion of pilgrimages of parishioners of the Russian Orthodox church to a Greek Orthodox monastery. Monasteries in Orthodox Christianity are viewed as "the foundations of the social world," they help in strengthening it by "transmitting religious knowledge [and] complementing parish-based institutional structures" (Hann & Goltz, 2010, p. 13). However, as presented in this study, there is also a contestation between the pilgrimage site and the site of origin.

Pilgrims who go to the monastery are embedded in parish life in various roles. They attend services regularly, participate as readers, choir singers or candle attendants, and are active in the social life of the parish as well – teaching Sunday school, preparing meals, and so on. There are occasional discontents between viewing the parish as a body of Christ, with the Liturgical worship at the heart of it (see Hopko, 2003), as an ethnic club for immigrants' socializing, or as a corporate legal entity. For some, the practical side of involvement in parish life, including occasional conflicts with the parish priest and questioning his authority, inhibits their spiritual growth. The desire for an authentic and unpolluted spiritual experience draws some parishioners to the Greek monastery in Arizona – to the "spa for the soul," in the words of one informant.

For some parish pilgrims, going to the monastery is like going to "a different planet," which provides opportunities "for complete detachment from the everyday concerns and for concentration on the inner work" (interview). This clear separation of two sites allows us to employ the Turners' paradigm of pilgrimage as an anti-structural event, leading to the emergence of *communitas* (1978). Pilgrims experience structural invisibility as they participate in service differently than they do at the local church, being able to completely immerse into the worship. Their unfamiliarity with the Greek language and liturgical practices facilitates a more direct experience of the service and an uninterrupted flow of prayer. The liminality of their experience is further amplified by the separation of women and men during services and in the guesthouses, and by the inversion of day and nighttimes in the liturgical schedule of the monastery.

Although they become detached from practical concerns of the local church, parish pilgrims face different challenges, particularly more rigorous physical demands on their bodies. Those include not only standing most of the time at the three- to five-hour nightly Liturgies, but also limited amounts of sleep. By setting their goals on spiritual cleansing and refilling themselves with grace, parish pilgrims are forced to reexamine and reevaluate their normal everyday behaviors and attitudes, including those of submission to authority, as seen in the discussion of the waiting room. According to some pilgrims, working on spiritually perfecting oneself translates into helping the community of the local church, and prepares one to face the various temptations and conflicts of parish life from a new angle. This analysis supports the idea that monasteries and parish churches exist in a relationship, complementing and nourishing each other.

However, pilgrimage to the monastery also underscores differences and contestations at both sites. The idealized state of *communitas* experienced by parish pilgrims at the monastery is reserved for people of the Orthodox faith and of certain levels of "spiritual maturity." Although willing, parish pilgrims are not completely successful in developing a sense of *communitas* at the local church, being unable to deliver spiritual lessons learned from their pilgrimage experiences to other parish members. Trips to the monastery are becoming more regular as the parish pilgrims seek to return to the source of spiritual nourishment. There are many paths one can take to achieve salvation, or "to get to the top of the mountain," as one informant called it, and for the parish pilgrims the road goes through the desert monastery, and is covered with honey.

---

### Acknowledgements:

A version of this paper has been delivered at the meeting of the Society of the Anthropology of Religion (2011, Santa Fe, NM), and I am thankful to those who offered their comments at this meeting. I thank Naomi Haynes and Kate Miller for their insightful comments on the draft of this paper, and two anonymous reviewers for *Tourism* for their questions and suggestions. I am very grateful to my informants for their openness in sharing of their experiences. I am especially thankful to Michael Di Giovine for his encouragement, support, comments and editorial help throughout different stages of writing this paper. The responsibility for the final version is, of course, mine alone.

## References

- Bolshakoff, S. (1980). *Russian Mystics*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications.
- Coleman, S. (2004). Pilgrimage to "England's Nazareth": Landscapes of Myth and Memory at Walsingham. In E. Badone & S. Roseman (Eds), *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (pp. 52-67). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Demacopoulos, G. (2008). Understanding Pastoral Care in the Early Church. In A. Papanikolaou & E. Prodromou (Eds), *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars* (pp. 87-112). Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Dostoevsky, F. (2002). *The Brothers Karamazov*. (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Dubisch, J. (1995). *In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eade, J. & Sallnow, M. (2000) Introduction. In J. Eade & M. Sallnow (Eds), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (pp. 1-29). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Fedotov, G. (1966). *The Russian Religious Mind: The Middle Ages, the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Centuries*. Vol. II. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Frey, N. (2004). Stories of the Return: Pilgrimage and Its Aftermath. In E. Badone & S. Roseman (Eds.), *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (pp. 89-109). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hanganu, G. (2010). Eastern Christians and Religious Objects: Personal and Material Biographies Entangled. In C. Hann & H. Goltz (Eds), *Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 33-55). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hann, C. & Goltz, H. (2010). Introduction: The Other Christianity? In C. Hann & H. Goltz (Eds), *Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 1-32). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hopko, T. (2003). The Orthodox Parish in America. In A. Vrame (Ed.), *The Orthodox Parish in America: Faithfulness to the Past and Responsibility for the Future* (pp. 1-10). Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press.
- Kenworthy, S. (2008). To Save the World or to Renounce It: Modes of Moral Action in Russian Orthodoxy. In M. Steinberg & C. Wanner (Eds), *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies* (pp. 21-54). Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Khoruzhiy, S. (2006). *Fenomen Russkogo Starchestva: Primery iz Dukhovnoy Praktiki Startsev* (Russian *Starchestvo: Examples from Spiritual Practices*). Moscow: Izdatel'skiy Sovet Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi.
- Kormina, J. (2010). Avtobusniki: Russian Orthodox Pilgrims' Longing for Authenticity. In C. Hann & H. Goltz (Eds), *Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 267-288). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mantzarides, G. (2011). *Monasticism*. Retrieved March 30, 2011, from <http://www.stanthonysonastery.org/monasticism.php>.

- Naletova, I. (2010). Pilgrimages as Kenotic Communities beyond the Walls of the Church. In C. Hann & H. Goltz (Eds), *Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 240-266). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Paert, I. (2010). *Spiritual Elders: Charisma and Tradition in Russian Orthodoxy*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Poujeau, A. (2010). Monasteries, Politics, and Social Memory: The Revival of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch in Syria during Twentieth Century. In C. Hann & H. Goltz (Eds), *Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective* (pp. 177-194). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rose, S. (1999). *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood.
- Sophrony A. (2001). *Wisdom from Mount Athos: The Writings of Staretz Silouan 1866-1938*. (R. Edmonds, Trans.). Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. (Original work published 1974).
- Turner, V. (1995). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Turner, V. & Turner, E. (1978). *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Vrame, A. (2008). Four Types of "Orthopraxy" among Orthodox Christians in America. In A. Papanikolaou & E. Prodromou (Eds), *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars* (pp. 279-308). Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Ware, T. (1995). *The Orthodox Way*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Submitted: 04/12/2011

Accepted: 07/03/2011